

Asthma in New Hampshire

Issue Brief – April 2003



WHAT IS ASTHMA?

Asthma is a chronic lung disease that has been increasing in prevalence in the United States since 1980. Asthma involves swelling and inflammation of the airways, reversible airway obstruction, and muscle spasms around the airways in response to a variety of triggers. The main symptoms of asthma are cough, chest tightness, wheeze (a whistling, high-pitched noise coming from the chest), and shortness of breath. Asthma symptoms can be mild, moderate, or severe. Anyone can get asthma, at any age. Asthma cannot be cured, but it can be controlled. With proper care, people who have asthma can live normal, active lives.

WHAT ARE THE TRIGGERS OF ASTHMA?

Asthma triggers—factors that may bring on or worsen asthma symptoms—include colds and infections, exposure to allergens and airway irritants, tobacco smoke (including secondhand smoke), exposure to cold air, vigorous exercise, and stress. Common allergens include pollen, mold, animal dander, feathers, house dust mites, and certain foods.

HOW IS ASTHMA MANAGED AND TREATED?

Illness and death from asthma can be largely prevented with good medical, environmental, and self-management. Good asthma management includes the avoidance of factors that trigger asthma symptoms, routine monitoring of the disease by a physician, and patient/family education. Quick-relief, or rescue,

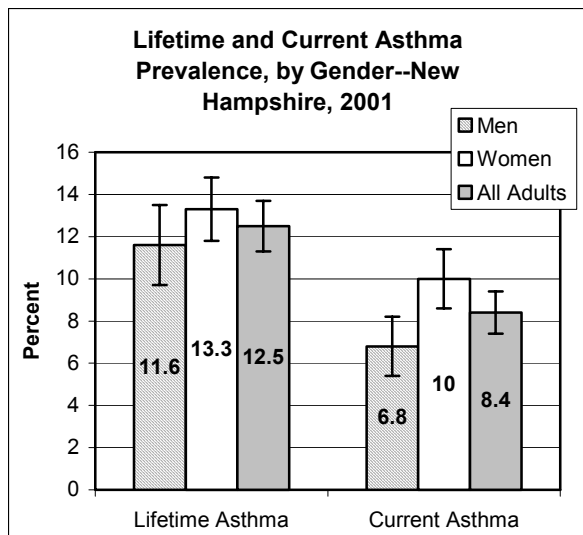
medications such as albuterol are used to relieve asthma symptoms. Long-term controller medications are used to reduce inflammation and prevent symptoms. Patients with asthma should have an asthma action plan that outlines the steps to take for daily management and describes what to do when asthma worsens. The plan should be updated regularly and shared with family members, health providers, and school nurses.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT ASTHMA IN NEW HAMPSHIRE?

Currently available data on asthma appear in the recently-published report *Asthma in New Hampshire, 1990-2001*. This Issue Brief summarizes some of the main findings of that report.

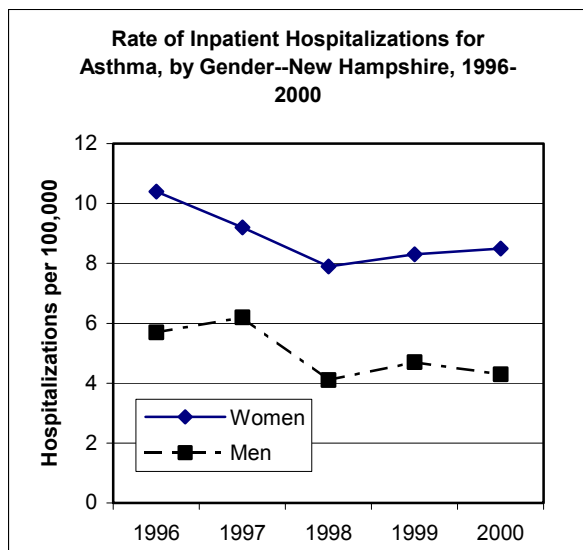
Prevalence

Asthma affects proportionally more children than adults, and more women than men. According to survey data, 12.5% of adults in New Hampshire have been told they had asthma at some time in their life. 8.4% of adults reported that they currently had asthma in 2001. The prevalence of current asthma is significantly higher among adult women (10%) than among adult men (6.8%) in New Hampshire. In addition, approximately 18% of adults reported they had a child in their household who had ever been diagnosed with asthma.



Hospitalizations

In 2000, there were 796 asthma-related hospitalizations of New Hampshire residents, resulting in 2,436 days spent in the hospital and total charges of approximately 4.1 million dollars. The hospitalization rate for asthma in 2000 was 6.5 per 10,000 residents. Women, children less than 5 years old, and adults 65 or older had the highest rates of hospitalization for asthma in the state.



Emergency Department Visits

There were 6,793 asthma-related emergency department visits in 2000, a rate of 55.6 visits per 10,000 residents. These emergency department visits resulted in approximately 3.3 million dollars in total charges that year. Women, children less than 5 years old, and people aged 15 to 34 had the highest rates of asthma-related emergency department visits in New Hampshire.

Mortality

Deaths from asthma are relatively uncommon, especially among young people. There were a total of 191 asthma-related deaths of New Hampshire residents over the period 1990-2000. Approximately 68% of all asthma deaths were among women. 61% of asthma deaths were among adults aged 65 and older. In 2000, there were 18 deaths from asthma in New Hampshire. Most deaths, hospitalizations, and emergency department visits associated with asthma are preventable if asthma is managed according to established guidelines. In New Hampshire, the Foundation for Healthy Communities has issued a set of evidence-based asthma management guidelines.

WHAT IS BEING DONE ABOUT ASTHMA IN NEW HAMPSHIRE?

The New Hampshire Asthma Control Program

Funding from the federal government helped establish the New Hampshire Asthma Control Program in October 2001. The goals of this program are to:

- Build capacity within the Office of Community and Public Health to address asthma

- Develop a system to collect information on asthma to guide efforts and monitor progress
- Establish a statewide advisory council and develop a comprehensive asthma action plan for New Hampshire
- Begin implementing the activities recommended in the action plan.

A Statewide Objective to Reduce Asthma

Healthy New Hampshire 2010 is the state's first disease prevention and health promotion agenda. It includes the following objective to address the problem of asthma in New Hampshire:

- Reduce hospitalizations for pediatric asthma (children 0 to 17 years of age) from a baseline level of 10.5 per 10,000 population in 1998 to 7.9 per 10,000 by the year 2010.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

For more information on the data presented here or to receive a copy of *Asthma in New Hampshire, 1990-2001*, contact the New Hampshire Asthma Control Program at (800) 852-3345 ext. 0854. For copies of the New Hampshire Asthma Management Guidelines, contact the Foundation for Healthy Communities at (603) 225-0900 or <http://www.healthynh.com>.